



# Australian Bureau of Statistics

## 1002.0 - Australian Statistics Advisory Council - Annual Report, 2012-13

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Includes: Text of the letter signed by ASAC Chair, Mr Geoff Allen AM, submitting the Annual Report to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, the Hon Steven Ciobo MP, for presentation to Parliament.



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Includes: Mission statement of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council.



#### **Foreword**

Includes: **Foreword** from ASAC Chair, Mr Geoff Allen AM.



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## Transmittal Letter

### TRANSMITTAL LETTER

The Hon Steven Ciobo MP  
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer

I have pleasure in submitting the Annual Report of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council for the year ending 30 June 2013.

The Annual Report outlines the work undertaken by the Council and is submitted to you for presentation to Parliament under sub-section 24(2) of the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

The Annual Report is dated on the day I approved the text for printing.

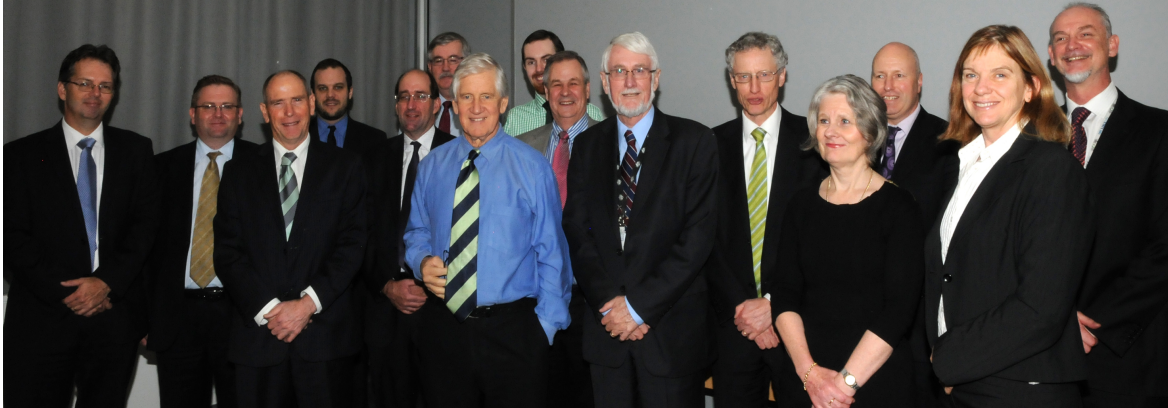
Geoff Allen AM  
Chairperson

9 October 2013

# Australian Statistics Advisory Council Mission

## AUSTRALIAN STATISTICS ADVISORY COUNCIL MISSION

To ensure that, in keeping with Council's statutory charter, the advice furnished to the Minister and the Statistician, in relation to the collection and dissemination of statistics, has due regard to relative priorities, is objective, relevant, timely, constructive and practical, and that it is sensitive to the needs of both suppliers and users of statistical data.



## Foreword



### FOREWORD

The role of ASAC is to provide guidance to the Minister and the Australian Statistician on the directions of, and priorities for, official statistics. This includes the improvement, extension and coordination of statistical services provided for public purposes in Australia.

The Council met in August and November 2012 and February and June 2013, with discussions covering a broad range of topics including:

- The ABS's future sustainability and its critical statistical infrastructure transformation program;
- The *Essential Statistical Assets for Australia* initiative;
- ASAC's plans to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Australia's official statistics;
- Progress of COAG reforms;
- NatStats 2013 Conference key themes and outcomes;
- The collection and coordination of firm-level data;
- The ABS's Statistical Spatial Framework; and,
- The role and function of New Zealand's Advisory Committee on Official Statistics.

Of increasing importance in ASAC meetings has been the ageing and fragile business processes and supporting infrastructure used by the ABS and the high risk this poses to key official statistics. While the ABS continues to be a world class organisation, the Council is increasingly concerned by these risks facing the ABS. These risks threaten the long-term sustainability of the ABS's critical contribution to the welfare of Australians through providing essential statistics to governments, markets and the wider Australian community.

As a first stage response to this situation, the ABS has already taken steps to identify a strategy to replace ageing capital infrastructure which is at critical risk of failure. This initiative is strongly supported by the Council and has become a standing item at recent Council meetings. The Council will continue to raise the critical nature of achieving further investment by government for this initiative in appropriate forums.

As part of its role in the National Statistical Service, the Council was actively involved in the *Essential Statistical Assets for Australia* initiative, which represents the first holistic assessment of the essential statistics needed for Australia. Two extraordinary meetings were held in August 2012 and again in February 2013, in order for ASAC to provide input and formally endorse the 2013 list of *Essential Statistical Assets for Australia*. The list was officially released in March 2013 at the NatStats 2013 Conference, held in Brisbane.

ASAC members were involved in the planning stages of the NatStats 2013 Conference, and it was gratifying to see some members directly involved as conference presenters or in panel discussions. The conference theme was *A better informed Australia: The role of statistics in building the nation*. A key focus was discussing how the world of information is changing and identifying the big data opportunities and challenges for Australia's statistical system. ASAC believes these conferences assist to affirm the significance of statistics in Australia and while they play an important role as a public policy forum, they also promote the importance of the national statistical system.

Further to its NSS role, ASAC has continued to progress discussions on the need for a national approach to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of Australia's official statistical system, holding a high level workshop in August 2012 to look at how a business case for reform could be taken forward. The development of this work will be a key focus for the Council next year.

A highlight of the year was meeting with the Chair of New Zealand's Advisory Committee on Official Statistics and the Chief Executive of Statistics New Zealand. Council members found many parallels in the challenges that were being faced by Statistics New Zealand and the New Zealand statistical system, and were encouraged by the similarity of solutions being reached. Engagement with international statistical committees provides valuable insight into the issues being faced in Australia and internationally, and the Council will continue to look for suitable opportunities to gain these perspectives.

This year, in conformity with good governance, ASAC undertook a Council self-assessment performance evaluation survey. I am pleased with the results of this survey, which looked at a range of matters including, the role of ASAC, the membership mix, the administration and management of meetings, and the balance between ABS and Council member inputs. One outcome of this review was the decision to systematically explore enhancing the value of Australia's official statistical system. Overall, Council members were satisfied with the performance of ASAC and felt ASAC was operating effectively in support of its statutory role.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

The Council has seen a number of changes to its membership this year. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of Mr Tony Stubbin, Ms Glenys Beauchamp PSM, Ms Serena Wilson, Dr Gary Ward and long-term member, Mr Peter Horn, whose ASAC memberships all ended in the past year. The work Council members undertake to support the activities of the ABS, and further the development of the NSS, is certainly appreciated. I would like to welcome Mr Bruce Michael, Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver AM, and Mr Antony Skinner who have all formally joined the Council in the past year. Their combined experience and expertise will add many benefits to the Council. Ms Pam Davoren, Dr James Moody and Mr Peter Verwer have agreed to be a part of the Council for a further three years. Their experience, knowledge and expertise are extremely valuable, and their ongoing commitment to the Council is greatly appreciated.

In what has been a busy year for the Council, I would like to thank Council members for their dedication and for their additional support to ABS activities during the year, such as the NatStats Conference. I would like to acknowledge and thank the former Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, the Hon Bernie Ripoll MP for his support to the ABS, his interest in the Council and his recognition of the need to bring improvements to the national statistical system.

I would like to thank the Australian Statistician, Mr Brian Pink, and his team for their positive approach to working with the Council, and for their willingness to consider and act on the advice we have provided during the year. I also thank the ABS staff members who provide secretariat services to the Council, arranging our meetings each year and administering ASAC memberships.

I look forward to working with the new Government and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, the Hon Steven Ciobo MP, as well as the Australian Statistician, Council members, State and Territory Governments and other key stakeholders in the National Statistical Service to build a richer portfolio of official statistics for Australia.

This report will be available on the Council website, which also contains information about the Council, including meetings, functions and membership.

Geoff Allen AM  
Chairperson

## About this Release

Outlines the functions of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council and describes the activities undertaken by the Council to discharge its responsibilities during 2012-13

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## Chapter 1 - About ASAC

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### CHAPTER 1

#### ABOUT ASAC

ASAC was established by the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

Under subsection 18(1) of the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*, the Council is to advise the Minister and the Australian Statistician on:

- a. the improvement, extension and co-ordination of statistical services provided for public purposes in Australia;
- b. annual and longer term priorities and programs of work that should be adopted in relation to major aspects of the provision of those statistical services; and
- c. any other matters relating generally to those statistical services.

The Act enables the Minister and/or the Australian Statistician to seek the advice of Council on these matters. The Council works closely with the Australian Statistician and the Council Chair meets regularly with the Minister to ensure advice and assistance is readily available to them.

The Act provides that the Council shall consist of a part-time Chair, the Australian Statistician (ex officio), and between 10 and 22 part-time members, including one nominee from each State Premier or Territory Chief Minister. The responsible Minister appoints the Council Chair for five years and members for periods of up to three years. Members are eligible for reappointment when their membership expires. The membership of the Council as at 30 June 2013 is detailed at Appendix 1.

Subsection 24(2) of the Act provides that: the Council shall, as soon as practicable after 30 June in each year, prepare and submit to the Minister, for presentation to the Parliament, a report relating to matters connected with the operation of this Act.

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## Chapter 2 - Summary of Activities 2012-13

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### CHAPTER 2

#### SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES FOR 2012-13

The Council held four meetings during 2012-13, on 10 August 2012, 13 November 2012, 19 February 2013 and 18 June 2013. (See Appendix 3 for agenda listings.)

## **NATIONAL STATISTICAL SERVICE (NSS) AND ASAC'S ROLE**

The Council continues to focus on improving coordination, integration and cohesion of national statistics and making better use of administrative data sources.

ASAC has continued to progress discussions on the need for a national approach to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of Australia's official statistical system. A high level workshop was convened in August 2012 by the ASAC Chair to identify issues in developing a business case for reform to Australia's statistical system. Building on support gained previously from the 2011 high level workshop on *Driving productivity and reform: Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of Australia's official statistics*, this second workshop provided an opportunity to gain valuable advice to help set out what a new framework for Australia's official statistical system could look like and how best this could be taken forward. This workshop also provided an opportunity to continue to gather support across governments for reform of the statistical system.

As part of these plans, ASAC has been working closely with the ABS to progress the *Essential Statistical Assets for Australia* initiative. In addition to discussion at the regular ASAC meetings during the year, two out-of-session meetings were specially arranged for the ABS to consult with ASAC members in the development of this initiative, which aims to identify a list of Australia's essential statistics produced by governments to assist in future investment decisions. ASAC endorsed the final list at an extraordinary meeting held on 19 February 2013. The 2013 list was released by the ABS in the publication *Essential Statistical Assets for Australia, 2013* (cat. no. 1395.0) on 14 March 2013. The Council has also provided early advice to the ABS on the next steps of the initiative which include the quality assessment of the statistical assets and the identification of Australia's Essential Statistical Infrastructure.

Further to its coordination role of national statistics, ASAC was consulted on the development of a whole-of-government plan to improve the collection and coordination of firm-level data by the Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. The Department is working to improve the consistency and coherency of the collection of firm-level data to support accurate and timely analysis which will enhance policy and program development and evaluation, and also maximise the research potential of firm-level data sources. The Department received Cabinet approval of the plan in November 2012.

## **ABS FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY**

The Council has become increasingly concerned by the ageing and fragile infrastructure held by the ABS and the high risk this poses to key national statistical outputs. While the ABS has made some significant gains in its information management transformation program, in the Council's view a larger scale investment is required. The Council has supported the ABS initiatives to work with Government to seek an injection of capital funding to invest in its statistical infrastructure for a sustainable future.

## **PROGRESS OF COAG REFORMS**

Ms Mary Ann O'Loughlin, Executive Councillor and Head of Secretariat of the COAG Reform Council (CRC), outlined to ASAC members the Reform Council's key achievements over the last five years across a number of COAG reform domains, including education, healthcare, disability, and housing. Ms O'Loughlin remarked on the successful partnerships forged during this time noting the leadership role the ABS had taken, and highlighted key ABS achievements such as the improved homelessness measures and the now regular collection of the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers every three years. Ms O'Loughlin also noted that there were continuing challenges in performance reporting, particularly related to data quality and gaps, as well as opportunities for using administrative data to address some of these challenges.

## **STATISTICAL SPATIAL FRAMEWORK**

ASAC members provided advice on the ABS's Statistical Spatial Framework which has been

developed to build a bridge between the statistical and spatial communities and the systems in which they operate. Members strongly endorsed the work the ABS was doing noting how the spatial dimension empowers not only the data, but also the user in their understanding of the data.

## **DISCUSSIONS WITH NEW ZEALAND'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON OFFICIAL STATISTICS AND STATISTICS NEW ZEALAND**

During the November 2012 meeting, ASAC members met with Mr Tom Lambie, Chair of New Zealand's Advisory Committee on Official Statistics (ACOS) and Mr Geoff Bascand, the then Government Statistician and Chief Executive of Statistics New Zealand. They discussed the role and function of ACOS and key projects Statistics New Zealand had been undertaking over the last few years. Interestingly, New Zealand and Australia were facing similar challenges. Of note was the 10-year transformation program which Statistics New Zealand is undertaking, with funding from the New Zealand Government, in order to modernise and standardise its ageing infrastructure systems. ASAC members were also interested in the Tier 1 Statistics initiative, which came out of a review of New Zealand's statistical system and determines statistical priorities, sharing a similar purpose as the *Essential Statistical Assets for Australia* initiative. Council members found these discussions extremely insightful and agreed to maintain links with ACOS.

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## **Chapter 3 - The Year Ahead - 2013-14**

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### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **THE YEAR AHEAD – 2013–14**

ASAC members have agreed on the following issues as Council priorities in 2013-14:

##### **STATISTICAL DIRECTIONS AND PRIORITIES**

Over the next 12 months the Council will advise the Statistician and the Minister on statistical services and priorities on the ABS work program for 2013-14 to 2016-17. In addition, the Council will advise the ABS on the directions and priorities it should be considering to enable it to remain relevant as Australia's National Statistical Organisation (NSO) in the longer term. The Council will continue to engage with members of international statistics committees to gain insights into priorities and risks facing other NSOs around the world.

##### **ABS FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY**

The Council will continue to monitor and advise the ABS in support of its critical statistical infrastructure transformation program and the re-engineering of its business processes. ASAC recognises the ABS has ageing infrastructure and also recognises these systems are becoming increasingly fragile and put at risk the output of key official statistics as well as the world class reputation of the ABS. Given the current ABS budget situation, the Council recognises that the ABS will require additional capital investment by Government in order to mitigate the risk to official statistics.

##### **NATIONAL STATISTICAL SERVICE**

ASAC will continue to lead discussions on the need for a national approach to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of Australia's official statistical system. A key focus for next year will be the development of a business case for reform to Australia's statistical system and the development of a forward-looking national statistics policy, both of which stem from agreement gained at high level



workshops looking at ways to improve Australia's official statistical system.

In addition, the Council will continue to work closely with the ABS to support the next phases of the *Essential Statistical Assets for Australia* initiative. The focus has now shifted to the quality assessment phase and identifying Australia's Essential Statistical Infrastructure (ESI). The quality assessment phase will assess each essential statistical asset against each of the seven dimensions of quality outlined in the ABS's Data Quality Framework, while the ESI phase will identify the underlying statistical infrastructure that are essential to generating the statistical assets on the list.

## COAG INITIATIVES AND REFORM

The Council will continue to monitor and support the statistical aspects of COAG initiatives. ASAC will keep abreast of the reform program across Commonwealth and State and Territory governments, and provide advice aimed at ensuring that needs are considered in the context of overall statistical priorities.

## CENSUS OF POPULATION AND HOUSING

The Council will continue to assist the ABS with preparations for a predominately digital Census of Population and Housing in 2016. The Council will provide feedback and advice on developments for the 2016 Census and on the responses from the public consultation on topics for inclusion in the next Census.

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## Appendix 1 - Membership of ASAC

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### APPENDIX 1

#### MEMBERSHIP OF ASAC



<b>Mr Geoff Allen AM</b> Director, ACIL Allen Consulting	1 March 2007
<b>Mr Brian Pink</b> Australian Statistician (ex officio)	5 March 2007
<b>Mr Michael Court</b> Executive Director, Western Australian Department of Treasury	27 July 2011
<b>Mr Matt Cowgill</b> Project Officer, Australian Council of Trade Unions	23 May 2011
<b>Ms Pam Davoren</b> Deputy Chief Executive, Policy Division, ACT Chief Minister's Department	18 November 2005
<b>Mr Clem Doherty</b> Chairman, Like Minded Individuals Pty Ltd	1 May 1997
<b>Mr Saul Eslake</b> Chief Economist, Australia & New Zealand, Bank of America Merrill Lynch	8 November 2010
<b>Dr David Gruen</b> Executive Director, Macroeconomic Group (Domestic), Australian Treasury	18 June 2010
<b>Ms Elaine Henry OAM</b> Chair, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth	15 May 2005
<b>Professor Graeme Hugo AO</b> University Professorial Research Fellow, Professor of Geography, and Director of the National Centre for Social Application of Geographic Information Systems, The University of Adelaide	15 May 2005
<b>Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver AM</b> Chair Indigenous Health, Professor Public Health, Unit Director Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit, School of Public Health & Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of New South Wales	8 April 2013
<b>Dr David Johnson</b> Director Macroeconomics, Forecasting and Fiscal Strategy, Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance	7 November 2010
<b>Mr Chris McGowan</b> Director, National and State Reporting, Cabinet Office, South Australian Department of Premier and Cabinet	22 May 2011
<b>Mr Bruce Michael</b> Deputy Under Treasurer, Northern Territory Treasury	30 January 2013
<b>Dr James Moody</b> CEO, TuShare	15 May 2005
<b>Ms Wendy Sawford</b> Deputy Secretary, Economic and Financial Policy, Tasmanian Department of Treasury and Finance	19 August 2011
<b>Mr Antony Skinner</b> Director and Queensland Government Statistician, Economic and Structural Policy, Queensland Treasury and Trade	8 April 2013
<b>Ms Louise Sylvan</b> Chief Executive Officer, Australian National Preventive Health Agency	15 May 2005
<b>Mr Michael Taylor AO</b> Chair, Gardiner Foundation	22 February 2010
<b>Mr Peter Verwer</b> Chief Executive Officer, Property Council Australia	24 July 2008

## Changes in Membership between 1 July 2012 and 30 June 2013

30 January 2013	Appointment of Mr Bruce Michael
8 April 2013	Appointment of Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver AM
8 April 2013	Appointment of Mr Antony Skinner
30 January 2013	Reappointment of Ms Pam Davoren
8 April 2013	Reappointment of Dr James Moody
8 April 2013	Reappointment of Mr Peter Verwer
14 November 2012	Resignation of Mr Tony Stubbin
21 February 2013	Resignation of Ms Glenys Beauchamp PSM
21 February 2013	Resignation of Ms Serena Wilson
8 March 2013	Resignation of Dr Gary Ward
30 April 2013	Resignation of Mr Peter Horn

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## Appendix 2 - Operation of ASAC

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### APPENDIX 2

#### OPERATION OF ASAC

The Australian Statistics Advisory Council was established by the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

The Chairperson of the Council receives an annual fee, set by the Remuneration Tribunal, and members are reimbursed their travel costs, where applicable. Apart from the Chairperson, no members receive remuneration for serving on the Council.

Secretariat services for ASAC are provided by the ABS. The office of ASAC Secretary is held by the Assistant Statistician, Office of the Statistician and External Engagement. Secretariat support provided by the ABS includes organising and recording meetings, administering membership and the members' website, and the preparation of the Council's Annual Report.

All costs outlined above are met from within the ABS Budget.

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## Appendix 3 - Agenda for ASAC Meetings

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### APPENDIX 3

#### AGENDA FOR ASAC MEETINGS

## 18 June 2013 Meeting – Agenda

1. Summary Record of Previous Meeting
2. Introduction and Chairperson's Report
3. Statistician's Report
4. Update on COAG Issues
5. Update from Council of Australian Governments (COAG)
6. Update on Improving the Collection and Coordination of Firm-Level Data
7. ABS Resource Allocation in Outyears
8. Update on ABS 2017 Transformation
9. Bringing Forward Member Issues
10. Essential Statistical Assets for Australia – Essential Statistical Infrastructure and Quality Assessment Phase
11. Outcomes of Natstats 2013
12. Members Closed Session

## 19 February 2013 Meeting - Agenda

An extraordinary meeting was held on 19 February 2013 for ASAC to endorse the 2013 *List of Essential Statistical Assets for Australia*.

## 13 November 2012 Meeting - Agenda

1. Summary Record of Previous Meeting
2. Introduction and Chairperson's Report
3. Statistician's Report
4. Informal Discussion on New Zealand Key Statistical Initiatives
5. Essential Statistical Assets for Australia
6. Crisp Revisited: Update on Progress and Confirmation of Process
7. Statistical Spatial Framework
8. Bringing Forward Member Issues
9. ABS Resource Allocation in Outyears
10. Key Statistical Priorities
11. ABS Enterprise Risks
12. Members Closed Session

## 10 August 2012 Meeting - Agenda

An extraordinary meeting was held on 10 August 2012 for ASAC to discuss the Essential Statistical Assets for Australia initiative, including the preliminary list and the planned next steps of the initiative.

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### APPENDIX 4

#### FREEDOM OF INFORMATION STATEMENT

Below is a statement, as required by section 8 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, about the structure of ASAC and how members of the public can obtain access to information held by it.

## **ESTABLISHMENT, ORGANISATION AND FUNCTIONS**

For information regarding the establishment, organisation and function of ASAC see Chapter 1 – About ASAC.

## **POWERS**

As an advisory body, ASAC has no decision-making or other powers directly affecting members of the public. It does not administer any enactments or schemes.

## **ARRANGEMENTS FOR OUTSIDE PARTICIPATION**

ASAC members are appointed by the Minister responsible for the ABS so that a broad range of views and interests are reflected in the advice that it offers to the Minister and the Australian Statistician. For membership details see Appendix 1.

Persons or bodies outside the Australian Government administration may participate in the Council's policy formulation by making representations to the Minister or the Chairperson on matters of concern to them.

## **CATEGORIES OF DOCUMENTS**

The ASAC Annual Report, which is tabled in Parliament, is available from all ABS offices, and on the ASAC and ABS websites. The ABS maintains files, on behalf of ASAC, which contain documents relating to: the administration of the Council; papers discussed at Council meetings; summary records of proceedings of meetings; and correspondence relating to the activities of the Council.

## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION PROCEDURES AND INITIAL CONTACT POINTS**

All inquiries concerning access to documents, including inquiries under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, may be directed to -

**Secretary**  
Australian Statistics Advisory Council  
c/- Australian Bureau of Statistics  
Locked Bag 10  
Belconnen ACT 2616  
Telephone: 02 6252 5448

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